

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER
40 Days of Community
Part 1
Rick Warren
October 2-3, 2004

"Since we are all one body in Christ, we belong to each other, and each of us needs all the others." Rom. 12:5b (NLT)

1. I NEED OTHERS TO _____ WITH ME.

"Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him..." Col. 2:6-7 (ESV)

"It is not good for man to be alone." Gen. 2:18 (NLT)

"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together... Instead, let us encourage one another." Heb. 10:25a (TEV)

- Community is God's answer to:

"When you gather, each one of you be prepared with something useful for all: Sing a hymn, teach a lesson, tell a story, lead a prayer, provide an insight... Take your turn, with no one person taking over. That way... you all learn from each other." 1 Cor. 14:26, 30-31(Mes)

"As each part does its work, it helps the other parts grow, so Christ's whole body is healthy and growing and full of love." Eph. 4:16 (NLT)

"Open your homes to each other without complaining." Peter 4:9 (TEV)

2. I NEED OTHERS TO _____ WITH ME.

"God made us to do good works, which He planned in advance for us to live our lives doing." Eph. 2:10 (NCV)

"Two people are better than one, because they get more done by working together." Eccl. 4:9 (NCV)

- Community is God's answer to:

"Every time we get the chance, let us work for the benefit of all, starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith." Gal. 6:10 (Mes)

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

3. I NEED OTHERS TO _____ FOR ME.

“Look out for one another's interests, not just for your own.” Ph. 2:4 (TEV)

“Keep being concerned about each other as the Lord's followers should.” Heb. 13:1 (CEV)

“A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.”
Eccl. 4:12 (NLT)

- Community is God's answer to:

“If one person falls, another can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble.” Eccl. 4:10 (NLT)

4. I NEED OTHERS TO _____ WITH ME.

“You should be like one big family, full of sympathy toward each other...” 1 Peter 3:8a (LB)

“If one member suffers, all suffer together.” 1 Cor. 12:26 (ESV)

- Community is God's answer to:

“Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep.” Rom. 12:15 (TEV)

“Encourage each other and strengthen one another.” 1 Th. 5:11 (GW)

5. I NEED OTHERS TO _____ WITH ME.

“Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples.”
John 13:35 (NLT)

“The Holy Spirit doesn't want you to be afraid of people, but to be wise and strong, and to love them and enjoy being with them.” 2 Tim. 1:7 (LB)

- God's answer to fear is _____.

“...You are working together and struggling side by side to get others to believe the Good News.” Ph. 1:27b (CEV)

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER
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Today is the beginning of a revolution. It's going to start with a very radical counter-culture message. What I want to talk to you about this morning is the exact opposite of what you've been taught most of your life. But God promises that if you'll do this, if you'll do it *His* way that you'll never again have to struggle with loneliness. You'll be able to overcome things like fatigue and fear and frustration and failure. That if you'll do what He talks about you'll be able to handle depression and despair and have that replaced with hope. It is the concept of community.

As Americans we idolize independence. In America we have the Declaration of Independence. We like songs like "I've Got to Be Me," "I'll do it my way," I don't need anybody to tell me what it's all about. We honor the Lone Ranger. We love the Lone Ranger. Of course even the Lone Ranger had Tonto but we like the idea of being totally independent. We have bought into a myth that says that the key to happiness is independence. If I have relational independence, financial independence, independence in every other area of my life, if I don't let anybody get too close to me but I'm totally self-sufficient, then I will be happy. And yet every year the suicide rate tends to rise. Obviously that's not true. God says that the key to happiness is not independence but inter-dependence. We need each other. We belong to each other. We need community in our lives. God wired you to go through life not as a solitary individual but in community.

The Bible says in Romans 12 *"Since we are all one body in Christ we belong to each other and each of us needs all the others."* We need each other. God says community is not optional. You may not feel it. You may feel like "I'm very self-sufficient. I don't need other people in my life." But the truth is you absolutely have to have other people in your life if you're going to be all God wants you to be.

A couple of years ago we did 40 Days of Purpose. The big idea of that spiritual journey over 40 days was that God put you on earth for five reasons. For five purposes. You're here not just to use your life the way you want to use it but to fulfill the five purposes God uniquely created you to fulfill. That's the big idea behind 40 Days of Purpose.

Today I want us to start a journey on an even bigger idea. That is you cannot fulfill God's purposes for your life by yourself. There's no way. There's no way you can be all God wants you to be, do all God wants you to do, fulfill the purposes that you were put on this planet to fulfill by yourself. You have to do it in relationship to other people. We need each other and we belong to each other in the body of Christ.

So today we're going to begin the second in a trilogy of three different campaigns, three different 40 Day Journeys. The first one was 40 Days of Purpose. This one is 40 Days of Community.

By the way, I don't know if you know this but about 25,000 to 30,000 other churches now have gone through 40 Days of Purpose. In fact, this week 6000 in America, 6000 more churches here in the United States and 3,000 overseas are beginning 40 Days of Purpose. About 35 million

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

people have now read The Purpose Driven Life. While they're going through that, we're going on to the next stage – 40 Days of Community. And by the way, we're also taking about 700 churches with us that we selected and invited to be a part of this in the pilot, which will be released to all the other churches next year.

We're going to focus on the greatest lesson in life. That is, learning how to love. Why do relationships go bad? How do you turn a bad relationship into a good one? What is it that God does when He uses other people in our lives and how does He do it to make us what He wants us to be? So we're going to discuss and discover what it really means to develop true, intimate relationships.

Today I want to give you a little introduction. We're going to look at why we need each other. Why we need God's family specifically the five reasons God says you need other people in your life and why you need a small group.

1. I need others to walk with me.

What does that mean? It means I need you to help me grow spiritually. Colossians 2:6-7 says *"Just as you received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in Him."* Did you know that the Bible often compares life to a walk? Why? Because you're on a journey. You don't just sit still in life. You're not where you used to be. You're not where you're going to be. You're on a journey. So it calls the spiritual life, the Christian life, a walk. Throughout the New Testament we're told to walk in wisdom, to walk in love, to walk in light. We're told to walk in obedience, in the Spirit, walk as Jesus walked. Many, many other ways the Bible tells us that we are to live life.

But one of the key ways that God tells us to walk is this: you were never meant to walk through life alone. This has nothing to do with whether you're single or married. Nothing at all. We have thousands of single adults in our church who are very involved in deep, intimate, meaningful community. We also have married couples in our church who are desperately lonely. Marriage does not solve the issue. Community does.

Some of you say, "Rick, what's wrong with walking alone? I like waking alone. In fact, I prefer it. I can go at my own pace, my own speed. I don't have to wait for anybody. Whatever. I like walking alone." You may like it but you need others to walk with you.

Let me give you three reasons.

1. It's safer. Walking through life with other people in your life is safer. It's less risky. Have you ever had to walk through a dark alley at night in the inner city by yourself? It's a little scary. Or a walk down a long road in the countryside by yourself. It can be scary. It's safer to walk through life with others.

2. It's supportive. What I mean by that is it keeps you from giving up. When you're walking with other people you get the energy to keep on going that you wouldn't have. Have you ever been in a marathon where you're running this marathon and you start getting a stitch in your side, a little pain there and you want to give up. That usually happens to me about mile twenty! Actually *step* twenty is when it happens to me. Step twenty! You start going, I can't go

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

on. I'm not going to be able to do this. I want to give up. But if you have other people walking with you, you can keep on going.

There's an old Zambian proverb that says, "When you run alone you run fast. But when you run together you run far." Good words. Life is not a 50-yard dash. It is a marathon. You want to make it to the end of life. The only way you're going to make it to the end of life the way God wants you to is by having other people involved in your life.

If you've ever watched in the fall when a flock of geese are flying south and they're in "V" formation. Do you know why they do that? Because it creates an uplift in the back draft and it makes it easier and they can fly farther and longer when they fly together.

The same is true in your life. You're going to burn out in life if you go through it without any meaningful intimate relationships. It's safer. It's supportive. Not only that but...

3. It's smarter. It's just smarter to go through life with a few really close deep friends. You learn more by walking with others than you do by yourself. Proverbs 28:26 says "*Only fools trust in what they alone think.*" In other words if I'm the only one who thinks this and nobody else agrees with me, guess what? I'm wrong. You may be walking in the wrong direction. But if you're walking by yourself through life you don't have anybody to go, "We're off the path. We missed it. We've got to get back on the path." The Bible tells us "*In a multitude of counselors there is safety.*"

One of the things that's very important that you learn when you walk with others is you learn how to get along with other people. If you go through life isolated, never let anybody get close to you, never cooperate with anybody you don't learn how to cooperate. And that's one of the great lessons of life. Have you noticed when you walk with somebody else everybody walks at a different pace. Different style. Those of you who are married have you ever tried to walk with your husband or your wife around the lake. It's different. Different strides. Different strokes for different folks. So we have to learn to compromise.

The Bible says this in Genesis 2:18 "*It is not good for man to be alone.*" That's the first thing God said after He created Adam. He looked down at a perfect environment, the Garden of Eden, and said, "It's not good. It's not good for man to be alone." God hates loneliness. He hates it. God hates loneliness.

So what's His antidote? He created two groups. Physical family and a spiritual family. The physical family is the one you grew up in. The spiritual family is the one you have the rest of your life. It goes on in to eternity. The physical family eventually moves apart, eventually dies and doesn't go on. But the spiritual family, God's church, is going to go on forever and ever and ever. So God says I want you to be connected in My family, the church.

Hebrews 10 "*Let us not give up the habit of meeting together* [notice it's a habit. It's something you do all the time] *Instead let us encourage one another.*" He says you're created for community and I want you to encourage each other by meeting together.

That verse is not talking about what we're doing right now. This is not community, folks. This is crowd! It's a quite large crowd. We can't encourage each other here. You can't even get to

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

talk to very many people. There's just too many people. This can only be done in small group. Can you be in a crowd and be lonely? Sure. This last week I was in Manhattan and had to go buy a coat for a TV show I was going to be on. I walked over by myself. I was with 100,000 people but I still felt very lonely because I didn't know anybody. So it has nothing to do with the size. It's talking about getting together with people who encourage you.

Community is God's answer to loneliness. We all need a place where we can practice love. It's what the world needs. We need to learn how to love. So we're going to begin a revolution of love today.

The Bible says that I've got to have other people in my life as I'm walking through life. I need other people to grow. I can't grow without others. The Bible is very clear about this. I cannot grow without other people in my life. Why? Because life is about relationships not about achievement. God is love and He wants me to learn to love Him and to love others. Those are the two greatest lessons in life.

The Bible gets very specific about this. 1 Corinthians 14, I love this in the Message paraphrase. It's pretty clear. *"When you gather each one of you be prepared with something useful for all. Sing a hymn, teach a lesson, tell a story, lead a prayer, provide an insight. Take your turn with no one person taking over. That way you all learn from each other."*

Does that sound like something we do here on Sunday morning? No. I don't stand up here and say, "Anybody got a poem? What happened to you this week? Who has a prayer request? Who learned something from God this week? Who needs to be prayed for?" We're too big to do that. This can only happen in a small group. That's why to be a healthy believer you need large group worship and small group fellowship. Temple courts and house to house. That's why in our church we ask everybody to come on a weekend service and be in a small group. If you're only getting half of that you're only getting half the benefit of this church. You need to walk through life in a small group of believers.

Why? Ephesians 4. *"As each part [talking about the body of Christ] does its work, it helps the other parts grow. So Christ's whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."* That's what God wants in your life and He wants it for all of us. He wants us to be healthy and growing and full of love. That's my prayer for you as your pastor. I want you to be healthy and I want you to be growing and I want you to be full of love. There's only one way you can do that. You've got to get with other Christians to walk through life with you.

You can't learn community without being in a community. Not a crowd but in a community. So that's why during the next 40 days I'm asking everybody in our church one hundred percent to get in a small group for just six weeks. I'm not asking you to do this the rest of your life. I'm just saying get in a group for the next six weeks because you can't learn about community without being in community. If you'll get in a small group or if you'll start one.

Just get three or four of your friends and start a group, then we're going to give you a box of material. It says "40 Days of Community." In this box is a whole bunch of material. First, we're going to give you a set of either DVDs or VCR of *Better Together*. This year I wrote and videotaped six Bible studies on how to turn bad relationships into good relationships. How to grow in love. How to develop friendship. How to build true fellowship. The only place you can

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

get this is by being in a small group. So you'll watch about twenty minutes of a teaching that I teach and then you can talk about it with three or four of your friends.

The second thing that's in the box is this book called Better Together: What on Earth are We Here For? I edited this. I wrote part of it – I didn't write all of it. I edited it to talk about forty daily devotionals on how to improve your relationships. You can't buy this book anywhere. It's never going to be in a bookstore. The only way you can get this book is be in a small group. There's no use reading it if you're not doing it. So to build relationships you need to get in a group. We'll give you one of those books.

Then we're going to give you a little key chain that says 40 Days of Community. Each week we're going to give you a Bible verse that will help you remember what we're focusing on that week. That's in the small group. And there's a lot of other stuff here that will be in your packet.

If you are a host and say, "I'll start a group in my home." HOST stands for Have a heart for people; Open up your home; Serve something to drink; Turn on the VCR. If you're a member of this church you can be a host. We're going to give you a copy of Answers to Life's Difficult Questions which is a book I wrote on Biblical answers to the twelve questions I'm most asked in counseling. Like, What on earth am I hear for? Or, Why is this happening to me? How do I know God's will? Stuff like that.

So far, in our church we have 2500 small groups. We have 2500 hosts who've said, "I'll open up my home for the next six weeks." In fact if you've agreed to be a host would you stand up right now? Applaud these people! These people who just stood are part of 2500 that are in our church. The people who are going to grow, the host will grow the most during this next 40 days. It's the people who give out that God blesses. We're blessed to be a blessing.

The truth is, if you're a member you could be a host. All you have to do is go outside and sign up and get a kit and invite some of your friends. Invite people who owe you money. Say, "You don't have to pay me if you'll come to this group!"

The fact is, any of you, if you're a member you can do this. I'm not talking about ten or fifteen people. I'm talking about three or four or maybe five of your friends. You get them and go through this material together and watch the video.

The Bible says this in 1 Peter 4:9 *"Open your homes to each other without complaining."* What's your complaint? What's your excuse for not opening up your home. "My home is dirty!" Clean it up! That's a real easy thing. "My home isn't big enough." Can you put three people in it? Then you can have a group.

The Bible says, *"Where two or more are gathered in My name, I'm there in the midst of them."* You say, "I don't like my neighbors." Don't invite them! I'm not telling you to invite people you don't like. Invite the people you do like. Invite your friends. Invite your coworkers, your family. You say, "Nobody would want to come to my house and study this." Really? Everybody has a longing for belonging. Everybody. Deep in the human spirit is a longing for belonging. It's why the worst kind of punishment is solitary confinement. We're made for relationships. God wired us that way. That's why people will join all kinds of stupid causes just

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

because they want to belong. The people in your neighborhood would love to come to your house.

Let me give you an example of this. Two years ago when we did 40 Days of Purpose on the day we started – like today – I handed out a little card, a little invitation card and said, I want you to give this card to somebody that you know that doesn't go to church anywhere. Or doesn't have any knowledge of the love of God. And invite them to your small group. In one week we went from 8000 people in small groups to 24,000 in small groups. Your neighbors are more willing to come than you're willing to invite them. They are.

Right in front of you is a little card rack with cards. This is this time's invitation. It says, "Have you seen this sign: Forty Days of Community. [Of course everybody's seen it because it's all over the county.] In the next 40 days thousands of our friends are going to meet in 3000 neighborhood home groups across Orange County. We'll meet weekly to discuss building community spirit, deepening friendships. It's a great way to get to know each other. We'll also watch and discuss a video series *Better Together* by Rick Warren, author of the number one best selling book in the world for the past two years [The Purpose Driven Life](#). I hope you'll be my guest at the group I attend. You'll love it." I want you to take one or more of these and use them this week. Invite people.

Community is God's answer to loneliness. Write next to it: The longing for belonging. I realize that many of you wait till the very last second to get into groups. Tom's going to come and talk to you in a second about how to get in a group or start a group.

Tom:

It is true that probably hundreds of you here and all of the venues you're not in a group yet. So how are we going to get a bunch of people in a group, all in just a few days. There is a group for you. You saw the 2500 who stood up, they're just waiting for people to join their group. We have groups that meet every day of the week, every time of the day, in 83 different cities, in 12 different languages. There is group for you. If you want a group that meets in Dana Point at midnight on Tuesdays who speaks Pig Latin, I'm sure there's a group for you. We've got groups.

Here's how we're going to get hundreds of us involved immediately. Just go online and do it. It's a very easy process. Go to saddlebackfamily.com, click on the big button that says "I want to get involved in a 40 Days group." You'll be taken to a screen that says where you want to meet, where you want to find a group, what kind of group you'd like, what time of the day, what day you'd like the group. Based on those choices you get a third screen of a list of twenty or maybe fifty or sixty groups. Pick out one of those groups, maybe the one closest to you or the best time and you call that group leader and say, "I'm showing up on Tuesday night." That's how we're going to fill up the groups.

Maybe you don't have a computer. Maybe you think all computers are of Satan. I don't know. But if that's true here's a phone number you can call. You can get in that way. Or you can use email. Maybe you're thinking, "I don't want to go to anybody else's home." Fine. You host a group. You go out and pick up one of those packets on the way out and host a group in your

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

home. None of us have to miss all the incredible things that are going to happen in the next 40 Days of Community. So make sure you get in a group this week.

Rick:

So that's the first reason to get in a group. We need people to walk with us.

2. I also need others to work with me.

I need people to work with me. The Bible says God put you on earth to do a certain work that only you can do. Ephesians 2:10 says this *"God made us to do good works which He planned in advance for us to live our lives doing."* Before you were even born God decided the talents that He was going to give you. The natural abilities He was going to give you. The background. He even chose where you would be born, who your parents would be, when you would be born, and all of this. Because He has a purpose for your life and part of that purpose is He has some work for you to do.

Anytime you use your talents or your abilities to help somebody else there's a word for that. It's called *ministry*, or service. All of us are ministers. Not pastors – ministers. What that means is when you use your gifts and what God wired you to be to help others you're doing what God wants you to do. He says these are your good works.

Remember we've talked about this many times. Life on earth is practice for eternity. You get a hundred years at the most on earth, you get trillions of years in heaven. In heaven you're going to do four things and one of the things you're going to do in heaven is you're going to serve God. So what God wants you to do while you're here on earth is spend some of that time practicing. Practicing serving. He says I want you to learn to serve. I want you to do these good works. But I don't want you to do them by yourself.

In heaven, when you get there everybody's got to work. But we'll all just have a little piece so you'll never get tired. You're not going to be overworked or overloaded in heaven because God will give you just a little piece to do. But everybody will do their part and it will all get done.

What happens here on earth though is you're worn out. You're exhausted. You're burned out. Some of you came to church exhausted. Why? Because you're trying to do it all and you're trying to do it all by yourself. That's why you're worn out. God never meant for you to go through life walking alone or working alone. You need to be in relationship with others who help you get done what you need to do. Otherwise you're going to be worn out and fatigued all the time.

God tells us in the Bible why we're supposed to work together. Ecclesiastes 4 *"Two people are better than one. Because they get more done by working together."* They get more done by working together! Everybody knows this. You get more done as a team than you do as an individual. It's also a whole lot more fun. It's also less tiring. You learn to cooperate together. There's all kinds of benefits to working together.

In the last twelve days I was on a speaking tour on the east coast. I spoke in eleven different cities in twelve days. It was up and down in a plane for the last twelve days. We started a week

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

ago on Friday to Washington D.C. where I spoke at the Pentagon. I spoke twice there, once to a generals Bible study that had 67 generals in it. Then another to the employees of the Pentagon. Then we left the Pentagon and we flew to Philadelphia where we had meetings there. We went from Philadelphia to West Point where I spoke to the 4000 cadets at West Point. Then we went from West Point to New York City. I had a half a dozen different meetings and did three TV shows. (By the way, I'm going to be on *Dateline* tonight at 7:00!) From there we went to Atlanta where I had a bunch of meetings. I would have been worn out if I hadn't taken a team with me. Then we went to Chattanooga where 170 churches in that one city did 40 Days of Purpose all together. It was city wide and they had 50,000 people going through it. They put up billboards all over town that said "Got purpose?" Then I went to Nashville and spoke to about 6000 mothers of pre-schoolers there. Then Liberty University and then I spoke at Annapolis at the Naval Academy. Then I stopped by Billy Graham's house and said Hi and came home!

I would have been worn out, I wouldn't even have been here this weekend, if it had all depended on me. It's just overwhelming that kind of schedule. But I took a team with me. I took Tom and I took Forrest and I took David and they traveled with me everywhere. Every time that plane hit the ground each of us knew what we had to do. Nobody's good at everything. Would you agree with that? Nobody's good at everything! So we need each other. So you put people around you who compensate for your weaknesses who are strong in areas you're not good at. I came home from that and I wasn't tired. I went to bed, got up the next morning at 6:30 and went back to work. Why? Because when you share together it lightens the load.

When we were at West Point they showed us a system that feeds 4000 cadets in fifteen minutes. Imagine that. They do it three times a day. Four thousand cadets in fifteen minutes. How in the world do they do that? Everybody has a role... with butter. (*Just seeing if you're listening.*) Everybody has a role to play. Everybody has a part. It's all like clockwork. Bam! Bam! Bam!

God has called Saddleback church to serve. It's in the fabric of our church. God has called us to model it to a lot of other churches. So we're taking on some huge problems. Global problems. Like poverty and illiteracy and disease and AIDS and things like that. Those kind of problems would be overwhelming but we're not going to do it by ourselves. We're going to involve thousands and tens of thousands and eventually millions of other churches. Everybody has a part and if you do little bits a piece it can all get done. The reason why you're exhausted is you're trying to do it all yourself.

Some people fall for what I call the Mother Teresa syndrome. That's the idea of the lone person goes out to change the world all by themselves. Even Mother Teresa didn't even do that. She had an army of people helping her. Other sisters in Sister of Charity who were helping her. In fact, last week in Washington D.C. Kay got to meet the successor to Mother Teresa and spend some time with her. They had an army of people helping on the streets of Calcutta.

You've heard me say before, snowflakes are frail but if enough of them stick together they can stop traffic.

Individually I can't make that big a difference in the world. And individually you can't make that big of difference in the world. But together... in this church we've got 82,000 snowflakes! That's a lot of snow. And that can make some significant difference. Together we can make a difference if everybody does just a little.

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

Community is God's answer to fatigue. If you're tired it's because you don't have the relationships built in to support you that you need in what God has called you to do. Have you ever watched on TV or a movie *Witness* where the Amish build a barn together. They do it in a day. The whole community shows up and where there was nothing, at the end of the day there's a barn standing. How? Everybody has a little part to play.

During 40 Days of Community our church is going to take on a very huge project in our community. We're going to feed all of the homeless in Orange County three meals a day. That's 35,000 people. That's about a thousand tons of food. That would be overwhelming if you just looked at it like that. But if everybody in our church who's in a small group and each small group gave about two hours to the project, we'd have the thing done in less than a week. It doesn't take that much effort when you have as many people in the family as we do.

Inside the bulletin there's a flap that talks about how to be involved in the 40 Days of Community Feeding the Homeless. If you'd like to be a part of that and your group, you can find that information.

The Bible says this in Galatians 6:10 *"Every time we get the chance let us work for the benefit of all [I need others to work with me] starting with the people closest to us in the community of faith."* What's the community of faith? It's our church family.

I want you to hear Nick's story. Give him a warm welcome.

Nick: These are a couple of my small groups. I'm your typical Saddleback plugged-in guy. By that I mean I know more than a couple people here and I try to participate where I can to help.

This past Sunday my wife asked me if I wanted to help with the food drive that she'd signed up for. I quickly said, "No." I had plenty of stuff to do just to catch up and I was already planning on those few hours to try to accomplish that. After confirming the store that she was going to go to she found out that they were very short handed. She told me that she was going to go out the door to our small group and neighbors and rally some support. She came home informing me that she'd recruited one of my friends by telling him that I was going. That changed my plans. I told Tom I wasn't interested in going but figured we'd go have fun together.

As we arrived and tried to figure out how we were going to do the work we learned about the web of relations involved in this event. It seemed another neighbor Jen had been roped in or had roped in Tom's wife Kim to do transportation with her. They were driving to different stores in the same shift. I thought again what a small world. As we started handing out the bags and flyers at the store we worked to come up with the one liner, the quick thing we could hit somebody with right up front that let them know what we were doing and it would be a magic bullet.

There was no magic. As we started to try to figure out what we could do we realized that about 90% of the people going into the store were taking bags. But the miracle we saw was the work God was doing with the people coming out of the store. We saw young folks

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

coming that had brought back one single item for us. At that age there was no way I would have bought something. We caught some guys running in to buy a 6-pack of beer for a ballgame. They came back with a full bag of groceries for us. Then we started getting reports that the aisles in the store that were busy were the aisles where the hot tickets on the little red slip we were giving were. Some of the men and women going in took bags so they wouldn't have to talk to us any further. They just grabbed the bags and ran in. Once in the store most of them were convicted and they came out with full red bags. We were getting excited.

We were about an hour into our four hour tour at that point. It was getting easy. We realized that the door that we were standing by had run out of carts and people were literally coming up with no carts and going into the store. So Tom ran out quickly to start getting more carts so they could go in and fill them up for us. The employees of the store got on the bandwagon by realizing that we had a great attitude and we were trying to help, being very polite and everything. They came out and started gathering up the carts. What they did was they brought back any of the red flyers that were crumpled up in the carts. They started straightening them out and bringing them back so we could recycle them and use them for more people again.

We filled box after box. Our kids were laughing and having a great time trying to run up and solicit new arrivals to help. Our four hour shift was over in no time. Far before the adrenaline ran out that was pumping us up. As we left and met family members we couldn't help but tell them about our day. I can't remember the work that I had to do that day. But I certainly remember the joy that still lingers in me from serving. As we came home with the last few boxes we found that another member of our small group was going Monday night to sort at the distribution center. God works in many ways. I got those two boxes back to where they needed to be and we found out that our small group member and friends were already placed by God in many different aspects of this campaign.

Tom and I were the reluctant soldiers but we really had a great time and saw how God worked. I thank God for using my wife, my family and my small groups getting me involved in this food drive. If you're like me, feeling some reservations about this drive, or physically getting out and helping I strongly encourage you to sign up and help. The fun and blessing that you'll receive is beyond words. God's work will be done but you will get your gift from Him during this drive as you work with those in your small group. Thank you for your time and God bless.

I need people to walk with me through life and I need people to work with me through life, but also...

3. I need others to watch out for me in life.

I'm talking about people who'll defend me, stand up for me, protect me. Who will help me keep staying on track, watch my backside, warn me. We all need this because we all have blind spots. The Bible says in Philippians 2:4 *"Look out for one another's interest, not just your own."* If you want a counter culture verse that's it. In America, the general idea is it's all about me. It's all about my needs, my interest, my wants, my desires, my ambitions. Forget you! I live for

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

myself. Forget everybody else. This verse says don't just look out for your own interest, look out for others too.

Have you ever seen these Neighborhood Watch signs. Sometimes you see them out in an area. That's a sign of community. It says we watch out for each other here. We're looking out for each other. My guess is if you went on vacation this summer, you were gone for a week, maybe two weeks, you probably told your neighbor you were going to be gone. You said, "I'm going to be gone for a couple weeks. Would you kind of keep an eye out on my house. Look out for my stuff." We all want our stuff looked out for! That's a good thing to have your stuff looked after, watched out for.

But my question is not is anybody watching out for your stuff. It's is anybody watching out for your soul. Your soul is a whole lot more important than your stuff. Is there anybody in your life who helps you stay on track spiritually? Is there anybody who loves you enough to say, "I'm not going to let you get discouraged. I'm not going to let you drop out. I'm not going to let you get tired. I'm here with you. Let me support you." And they encourage you in your spiritual life. If you don't have anybody like that, that's sad.

The fact is we all have blind spots. Things we can't see.

I grew a beard this summer. Then my wife Kay said "If you're going to have a beard you've got to get rid of the flat hair thing." So she came up with this little spikey do here. The only problem is I can't see the back and it sticks up straight on the back so I don't know if it's sticking up or not. Last night and again this morning, I'm getting ready to come to church, I start to walk out the door and Kay goes, "Stop!" I think, What did I do? She's fixing my hair! I would have never known it.

You get a tail light out. You're never going to know it. Somebody's got to look out for you. Somebody's got to say, "You've got a tail light out!" Hopefully somebody tells you when you're unzipped! Friends, we're family here! If I'm ever unzipped, tell me! Don't let me go through the whole service! Stand up and say, "Pastor!..." Friends don't let friends get tacos in their teeth. Or a little bugger. That's what people who care about you do. They say, "You've got a bugger! Get that thing out!" We need to watch out for each other because there's some stuff we just can't see.

The Bible says in Hebrews 13:1 *"Keep being concerned about each other as the Lord's followers should."* We should care about each other. We're family. We're in God's family. As brothers and sisters I should defend you and you should defend me and I help you stay on track and you help me stay on track.

It says, "keep being concerned." Circle "keep." That means not just once. You're vigilant. In a war everybody has to take time on sentry duty. While everybody else is sleeping somebody stays awake and makes sure the enemy isn't crashing in.

Since 911 we've all been a whole lot more vigilant for each other with terrorism and things like that. But did you know that you have an enemy far more destructive than terrorists? Oh yes! You have a personal enemy. And he hates your guts. He wants to defeat you. His name is

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

Satan. Satan wants to mess up your life. Satan wants to bring problems into your life. Satan wants to ruin your relationships. He wants to hurt you as bad as he can.

Why would he do that? Because he can't hurt God. What Satan wants to do is hurt God but he can't. When you can't hurt somebody what do you do? You go after their children. If you couldn't get to me you'd go after my wife or my kids. Satan can't hurt God. So what does he do? He tries to hurt God's children. He doesn't care what it will take, how badly you get hurt. He wants to mess you up anyway. The moment you wake up in the morning he's already been plotting how to get you to waste that day, to blow it with anger or worry or fear or guilt or shame or depression. Or any other resentment or bitterness. He'll just try to get you all messed up.

I've been reading this 911 report from the commission. It's interesting reading, but as I read it I thought what are the parallels here between our battle, our spiritual battle against Satan. Listen to this parallel – this is what the commission reported: “We learned about an enemy who was sophisticated, patient, disciplined, and lethal. [That's exactly what the devil is.] The enemy rallies broad support by redressing political grievance but its hostility toward us and our values is limitless. [And Satan's hatred of you is limitless.] Its purpose is to rid the world of religious pluralism. It makes no distinction between military and civilian targets, collateral damage is not in its lexicon. [Satan doesn't care who gets hurt. He just wants to hurt.] We learned that we did not understand how grave this threat could be. So we did not adjust our plans and practices to deter or defeat it. [If that doesn't describe most Christians...! We don't realize the war we're in so we don't make any plans to handle temptation.] The test before us now is to sustain the unity of purpose [I could have written this stuff!] and meet the challenges now confronting us. We need to design a balanced strategy for the long haul to attack terrorists while at the same time protecting ourselves against future attack.” We not only have to protect ourselves. We have to go after them. That's what it says in the Bible. *“The gates of hell will not prevail against them.”* Gates are defensive. You're going after the devil, not vice versa.

When Satan attacks you, he doesn't come in a little red costume and a pitchfork and say, “Boo!” How does Satan mess up your life? Through habits you can't break, through hurts that you won't let go of and you hold on to the resentment, through hang-ups you can't change in your life, through problems and circumstances, through relationships that break your heart and hurt you. He always works around and through others. Most Christians are defeated. They live in defeat. Why? Because we try to fight him on our own. And that's stupid. You're never going to win against the devil on your own. You need other people who will watch out for you and help you.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 *“A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better for a triple braided cord is not easily broken.”* That's a small group. He says you watch out for each other.

Last year about this time I walked across a maximum security prison yard in northern California. Two thousand inmates in that yard. And I walked across it with no guard protecting me, no gun, no weapon, no body armor. Just myself. And I was not afraid. Why? Because I had a group of other inmates, about thirty of them, who were Christians in front of me, behind me and on either side of me. If anybody wanted to get at me they were going to have to get through these guys who had these tattoos that said “Mom” and “Jesus.” There's no way I felt worried. These guys were there to protect me.

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

Here's my question. Is there anybody watching your backside? Anybody who's watching out for your spiritual welfare? Do you have anybody close like that? Are you in a small group where that group of guys if you're a guy or women if you're a woman, who are saying, We're there when you're going through the tough times. We're not going to let you get discouraged. We're not going to let you get depressed. We're not going to let you get worried. We're going to be here with you. If you don't have anybody like that I pity you. You've got a big bull's eye on your back for Satan. It's like, "Here's a loner. They're not connected. They're not in a group."

I know this is hard to believe but when I was young I was a lifeguard for three summers. Actually they fired me because every time I'd see a hand I'd go, "Yes, I see that hand. God bless you! Yes, God bless you. Yes. Many are raising their hands!" *I made that part up.* But I was a lifeguard. Everybody knows you never go swimming by yourself in the ocean. You might catch a riptide. You never go by yourself.

Did you read about the kid who was an experienced climber a couple months ago. He's climbing a mountain, slipped and fell, fell into a ravine and got his arm caught. And he couldn't get out. He would have died there because he was by himself. He thought he knew enough to go it on his own. The only way he broke free was he had to cut his own arm off. Or die. Even the pros need a buddy.

Community is God's answer to defeat. The Bible says in Ecclesiastes 4:10 *"If one person falls another can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble."* All groups are based on this principle. Hear Ed's story.

Ed: I'm a believer in recovery from sexual addiction. I would like to share with you the support and encouragement God brought into my life through my small group in Celebrate Recovery, a men's Step study. These are my brothers who struggle with hurts, hang-ups and compulsions such as alcohol, drugs, over eating, co-dependence, anger, sex, and adult children of alcoholics. We've met each Monday night for the last year working through the twelve steps and eight principles on the Road to Recovery using the Celebrate Recovery workbooks and Life Recovery Bible. It has been the safest, most transparent, encouraging and supportive group I can ever imagine. This is a group of men who watch out for each other and help each other stay on track.

I moved here from Detroit after I got a job with a large firm in Orange County designing in the automotive industry. Shortly after I moved to California I married my best buddy, Amy, and began to attend church regularly. We started coming to Saddleback church in January, 2001 where we both began to serve and recognize our shape for ministry. The Lord had blessed me in many ways but I began to see that I still had a lot of baggage and had not worked through the issues in my past. I prided myself on being able to stop drinking just before being saved. And it seemed that *I* had my sexual addiction under control, thank you very much. However, I rediscovered pornography. My lust had returned with a vengeance and I needed help. My wife was encouraged to attend Celebrate Recovery during her shape interview. I decided to go with her for support.

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

I had heard about Celebrate Recovery during a sermon by pastor Rick. But I did not think I needed it. I was in control. I am so very glad now that I went. It has changed everything in my life. I've now been in recovery from sexual addiction for over three years. The turning point for me was working through the step study format with my small group. I'd like to thank my "step" brothers who have supported me on the road to recovery.

My job requires frequent travel to Detroit. For a guy in recovery from sexual addiction there's nothing more frightening than spending the night alone in a lonely hotel room. The temptations for isolation and pornography can be overwhelming. I'm so thankful for the connections I've made in our step study. I cannot express how grateful I am for being able to pick up the phone and call one of the guys on the phone list in the group and talk about what I was going through and having them understand and be there for me. And to know that I am truly connected to the body of Christ through my step study. We have found that we truly need each other.

We recently completed our step study. These guys encouraged me to reach out and give back as a leader for the next step study, which will start soon. There's no substitute for having others stand alongside you to watch your back and come to your defense. As God teaches me to lead with my weaknesses I am continually blessed in my service in this program. Although I have not arrived I am seeing improvement in my life day by day as I trust the Lord and learn from the many godly men who serve in celebrate recovery. Our group verse is Proverbs 27:17 *"As iron sharpens iron so one man sharpens another."* I encourage you to get into a 40 Days of Community small group where you too can have others to watch out for you, help you stay on track and look out for each other's interest. We are stronger together and support each other through the good times and the tough times. Thank you for letting me share.

I'm grateful for a church where guys are honest enough to talk about weaknesses. I know a lot of guys in the world who live in total denial. You say, "I don't have a sexual addiction." Maybe not but I'll tell you this. You got something in your life you can't get control of I guarantee it. I have never yet met a single person who doesn't have something in their life they'd like to change but have been unable to change. You're never going to be able to change it on your own. If you could have, you would have but you can't so you won't. So you need other people. Some problems in our life only get solved by team tackling together. I need people to walk with me and work with me and watch out for me.

4. I need others to wait with me and to weep with me.

To wait and weep. I'm talking about they wait while I'm waiting for the bad news. And they weep when I get the bad news. I need people with me in the inevitable crises of life, when the tragedies hit. I don't want to face that alone.

As your pastor I especially feel this one. I see it on a daily basis. There are situations that nobody should ever have to go through alone. Nobody should ever have to wait in the hospital while a loved one is in a life and death surgery. Nobody. No woman should ever have to wait alone waiting for the lab report back on a problem pregnancy. Nobody. Nobody should have to wait for news from a battlefield alone. Nobody should have to stand at the edge of an open grave

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

alone. Nobody should have to wait at home alone for the coroner to come and publicly identify the body of a loved one who just died. Nobody. Nobody should have to spend the first night alone after their husband has died or wife has died. Nobody should ever have to spend the first night alone when their wife has just walked out. Or their husband's walked out.

The fact is some of these things are going to happen to you. They're inevitable. You're going to have loved ones die. You're going to go through tragedy. You're going to get bad health news. You're going to find out one day that you are dying. You need other people in your life. Only a fool would go all the way through life totally unprepared for something that you know is inevitably going to happen. The time is now to build the safety net, the network of supporters, of friends. Get it in place now because at some point the tragedy is going to happen. You don't know when. The time to prepare is now.

What is God's safety net? It is a group of other believers. You don't need a hundred. You only need five or six. But it's a group of other believers who are committed to you.

The Bible says this in 1 Peter 3:8 *"You should be like one big family full of sympathy toward each other."* When you're in the hospital you don't want the whole church to visit you. In fact, it'd be kind of bad if all of us came. But it would be nice to have four or five come see you and say we're praying for you.

I'll never forget. There was a guy who came to this church for seven years. He sat up in the bleachers. He came for seven years, never got involved in anything, never joined a small group. Just came to worship and left. Never even met anybody in the church. I'm the only person he ever knew. Never made any friends in the family. One day he had a heart attack and got in the hospital. Then he got an infection and he was in for two weeks. I was out traveling around, speaking somewhere. I didn't even hear about it until I got back. When he got out of the hospital he came to the church and said, "I'm leaving the church." I said, Why? He said, "Because it's unfriendly. Nobody visited me in the hospital." I said, I'm sorry and he left. As he left I thought, *It's your fault.*

He never visited anybody in the hospital. He never cared about anybody but himself. He never cared enough to even meet anybody. He's going to die and go to heaven and meet somebody and say, "You were at Saddleback? I didn't know you were there." He never got in a group, never gave, never shared. It was his fault when the crisis came that nobody was there for him.

I've told you many times that I could not make it in life without my small group. Eight other people, plus my wife and I in our small group. This last year we've gone through practically every kind of family or personal crisis you can imagine. We've been there to wait for each other and to wait with each other and to weep with each other when we needed support.

Here's God's plan, 1 Corinthians 12 *"If one member suffers all suffer together."* I read recently about a guy who died at home in his bed and nobody discovered it for two years. I thought how tragic! That a guy was not even missed for two years. Can you imagine the despair in that man's heart as he was dying in bed? Nobody should ever die alone. Nobody should ever have to go through that kind of despair.

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

Community is God's answer to despair. Romans 12:15 says *"Be happy with those who are happy and weep with those who weep."* We do that in the group. Somebody has a good thing a promotion or celebration, a graduation, we party. We have a good time. We have fun. Somebody has a tough time, we weep with them.

By the way, a lot of times in groups and small groups, people won't know how to deal with tears. You'll be in a small group and someone starts crying, a tear comes down their cheek. Let me give you a little tip. A tear is always a sign it's time to stop and pray. That's what you do. Whenever there is a tear it's time to stop and pray.

Like, "Let's just stop right now and pray for Mary. She just got this news from her sister. Let's stop and pray for her right now." ... "Let's stop and pray for Bob right now. He has given 22 years of his life to this corporation and they just laid him off with one week's notice. And he's pretty devastated. Let's pray for Bob right now." That is the sign... you don't have to fix anybody's problem in your small group. They don't want you to fix it. They just want you to sympathize. When you're going through a crisis you don't want advice, you just want somebody to be there. Just sit there with them, silent, hold their hand, put an arm around their shoulder. Cry with them. Be there with them.

In fact it's usually when we start talking we get in trouble. We give stupid advice and stuff like that. Just be there. Sit there with them and sometimes you sit in silence. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 says this *"Encourage each other and strengthen one another."* I want you to hear a great story from Tom's small group. Would you welcome him?

Tom: If you look up at the screen you'll see a picture of our small group. This story is all about them. Our group started during 40 Days of Purpose two years ago. At the beginning most of us didn't even know each other. Some of us had recently been married or remarried. Some had been married for several years. Some were single. Some came without their spouses. The thing that we shared in common at the beginning was the desire to learn more about Jesus Christ and His plan for our lives.

During the first year and a half we grew to know each other and began to share the burdens that we felt in our lives. We shared about the struggles of building Christ centered marriages, health issues with our family and friends, loss of jobs, problems with our children, and a variety of life's stresses and challenges. The group grew as we invited friends to share in the love and community that we are experiencing. God had a plan and He knew that events would happen in our lives where we would truly, truly need this community. I'd like to tell you about two of these events.

Mike and Carolyn had been coming to our group from almost the beginning. Mike is one of those guys who asks the tough questions and challenges us to think about our faith and about what God's word says to us. As Mike says we have some serious disagreements but we have learned to love and respect each other. We didn't know it but Mike was about to get on a roller coaster that would take him and Carolyn through some huge emotional ups and downs. Mike developed a cough that would not go away. After prodding from Carolyn he finally went to the doctor. He was told that he had a mass in the lower lobe of one of his lungs. We prayed for Mike before he went to each doctor's appointment. We were encouraged after the doctor did several procedures but didn't find any cancer cells. Finally

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

Mike decided to have the mass removed in the event that there were cancer cells in it. He's currently undergoing chemotherapy and radiation.

I'd like to read you some thoughts that come directly from Mike's heart. He says, "After my cancer diagnosis all of these people that I had been praying for were now praying for me. And most amazing was that I could feel it in my heart. I had never experienced a group of believers laying their hands on me and praying for me. Wow! What a feeling! It was so warm and real that I really can't describe it. But it was life changing and it is the ultimate example of what a small group does best. If you want to grow as a Christian you need to be in a small group."

Charlie had been in our group for about a year. One day this spring he came home and found that his wife had left him. We all knew that they had been struggling with some issues but this was a very big surprise for Charlie and for our group. That started a series of events and emotional challenges for Charlie. We prayed for him and encouraged him to focus on becoming the man that God wants him to be. In the middle of this struggle he called one day to say that he had been fired from his job. During the next meeting Charlie opened his heart about his life struggles that helped create these situations. We all prayed for him and encouraged him. He has trusted God through the difficult times, worked hard to grow, and continues to share openly with his small group family. Just the other day Charlie was offered a new job and also received acceptance into Biola University where he'll complete his degree with a ministry emphasis. As Charlie recently said, "I still don't know where my life is going but I do know this. I have a group of people that I love and meet with every week. I know that no matter what happens to me they will be there for me."

In closing, from everybody that you see in our group we'd like to say this to you: Please, please! If you're not in a small group join one today. Don't try to go through life alone. You may be in an area of calm right now but you never know when the next storm is going to hit. We surely didn't in our group. Our lives are far richer and our faith and trust in Jesus Christ has grown stronger through this small group family. Thank you.

The fifth reason I need other people in my life is...

5. I need others to witness with me.

What do I mean by that? You have a life message that God wants you to share with the world. It's part of your mission. The Bible says that God put you on earth to do a mission. There is great power in group witness. God never meant for you to do your mission alone. God would never send a soldier out by himself. He says we go out together.

What is the way you witness best to people who don't know the love of God? How do you witness best to them? God says it's by loving others in the family of God. Jesus said in John 13 "*Your love for one another* [He didn't say for Me. Not for God. Not for Jesus] *will prove to the world that you are My disciples.*" What impresses the community the most? When Christians – believers – love each other. The one thing that proves to the world that you're in the family of God, that you've stepped across the line, that you're headed for heaven is that you love other people in the family of God. If you do not love other people in the family of God you've got a

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

reason to doubt, “Am I in it?” Because that’s one of the things. When you’re truly in God’s family you start loving others in God’s family.

That’s what impresses the community “*See how they love.*” That’s what we want Saddleback to be known for. What impresses them is not our size, not our building, not our sermons, not our music, but that’s the place where you get loved. That’s where they love you. That’s where it’s ok for a guy to stand up and go, “I’ve got a sex addiction.” That’s the place where it’s ok for a woman to stand up and say, “I just lost my husband. He walked out on me.” That’s the place where you’re not perfect but they love you still. That’s what we want to be known for.

During the next 40 days we are going to start a revolution of love in this community that will spread – literally – around America.

2 Timothy 1:7 says this “*The Holy Spirit doesn’t want you to be afraid of people but to be wise and strong and to love them and to enjoy being with them.*” And I’m going to add “And invite them into your home.” Enjoy being with them and invite them into your home.

How many of you put up one of the 40 Days of Community yard signs? I’m proud of you! They’re everywhere. Eighteen thousand of these are spread out all over Orange County. They’re everywhere. Have you figured out that this is a great conversation starter? It’s funny. I heard about a lady invited to church. “I want you to come to 40 Days of Community with me for the next six weeks? We’re going to learn about relationships – why do they go bad, how do you make them better, how do you improve them. It’s all about love.” The lady said, “Now it makes sense! 40 Days of Community. There’s the nicest man on our street and he put up a 40 Days of Community sign. I thought he had got in trouble with the law. I thought he broke a law and the judge sentenced him to 40 Days of Community service.” So if you don’t tell people why you’ve got the sign up they’re going to think you’re a drug dealer!

I’ve often asked you this question: Is anybody going to be in heaven because of you? Let me make you a little guarantee. If you will get in a small group for the next six weeks and you will take one of these invitations and you will invite somebody who doesn’t go to church to come and be in that small group and watch those videos that I’ve taped, together we’ll make this happen. By the end of 40 days you’ll be able to say, “Yes! Somebody’s in heaven because of me.”

I’ll help you. We’re going to do it together. God’s answer to fear is community. Philippians 1:27 says “*You are working together and struggling side by side to get others to believe the Good News.*” That verse has the two goals of what we’re going to do. First, deepen community within our church. And then reach out to community around our church. Listen to Bonnie’s story.

Bonnie: Our small group at the time were six empty nesters looking for a way to serve together. We had done some research and looked into some ideas but nothing had really materialized. Our focus was local only. Key word is “local.” Though I had been on an international mission trip in the past my husband Peter was not a traveler and did not care to travel. Since we’re both involved in the local ministry for abused children in the foster care system called Royal Family Kids Camp I just expected we’d continue working with children in some way. Then one day Kay Warren spoke at church and she introduced Sister Frieda from a little field hospital in Kenya and told her story. I was touched and actually began to think of the

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

enormous problem in Kenya and how we can help. That was the first indication that God was whispering in my ear. But true to form I just brushed it away.

Sometime later there was a notice in the bulletin that anyone interested in information on a trip to Kenya should come to a meeting. Right then in the worship service it hit me that God had been speaking to me. I hadn't really been listening but it hit me then. He wanted me to go to Kenya. So I leaned over and showed the little notice to Peter and said, "I'm going to Kenya!" He ignored me. On the drive home I told him again and this time he said, "You're not going there. It's not safe." I'd heard those same words a couple of years before when I had gone on a mission trip to Romania. So as he fondly tells me I'm incessant and I was. I just kept talking about it.

The information meeting was on a regularly scheduled small group night. That was kind of a problem. So I invited all of the small group to go to the meeting with me. I said that we could all help in preparation for this trip. But secretly I thought they could help with preparation, I was going on the trip. Peter was not happy. He wanted to know why I couldn't just go someplace safe and then he grudgingly agreed to go to the meeting if for no other reason than I'm going to do whatever I feel like anyway and he may as well know where I'm going to be. The others agreed also. Probably just to make me happy. We planned to go to the meeting.

The night before the meeting, Earl called and said, "Bonnie, I want to make this perfectly clear. Virginia and I are going to this meeting because we love you and want to support you but we are *not going* to Kenya." I was thrilled they were just going to give up small group for the night.

So the big evening arrived and we went to this meeting. Steve Rutenbar presented some very compelling reasons to go. He reassured us we didn't need any special qualifications and that we really could make a difference.

When God works, He can work really fast. Because when the six of us left that night the seeds had not only been planted they were germinating. In a very short time God had spoken to all the others and we were all going. If you don't think God performs miracles in ordinary people! So six, not so young people, with no particular skills joined a team of 62 other people, regular people of all ages. We became an instant extended family and were surrounded by love for each other and the people we were yet to meet.

Pastor Rick recently emphasized the stewardship of influence in a message. Sixty eight people on that mission trip and all the others are influencing others. We can't fix the entire world all at once. But if each one of us reaches out across cultures to just one person, makes one friend, changes one life just a little bit, then the uneducated won't feel so isolated, those who are sick won't feel so alone. And those who are hurt won't feel so unloved. That's how change happens. One person at a time.

As for the six of us, we've become closer than ever because we have this added bond and experience that God performed and God provided and called us to do. Now we've added a fourth couple and we'll all be serving in 40 Days of Community together and wherever else God takes us. Thank you.

WHY WE NEED EACH OTHER

40 Days of Community – Part 1

We all need each other. We need other believers to walk with us, to work with us, to watch over us, to weep with us and wait with us when we need to wait, and to witness with us. Say this, “I really, really, really need a group.” That is your declaration of interdependence.

Inside your program there’s a covenant card. This card is different. I don’t want you to turn it in. I want you to take it home. Sign it. Put it up on your mirror, your refrigerator, your desk, your computer, wherever you will see it everyday for the next 40 days. It says this: “I will participate in the 40 Days of Community home group. I’ll read a chapter a day from Better Together. I’ll do my best to hear all seven of Rick’s messages. And I’ll try to memorize a Bible verse each week if possible.”

If you will do this, here’s what I want you to do. Clear your calendar as much as possible for the next 40 days. Clear your calendar so you can do these things. If you do, I guarantee you, you will look back and say, “That was the turning point of my life.”

This church is all about community. Community is our middle name! Saddleback *Community Church*! God has chosen you to be a model for millions and millions and millions of other people. Tens of thousands of other churches will be doing this program.

Of all the people that God could have chosen to be at Saddleback at this time and this place He chose you. Why? Because He wants to use you. God did not bring you to this church so you can watch history being made from the sidelines. He brought you here because He wants you to be a leader in it. To be involved in it. I’ve been praying for 100% participation. You can’t learn about community without being in community. I don’t want you sitting on the sidelines.

Prayer:

Father, it’s time for the church to be the church. And it’s time for a revolution of love and fellowship and community. Please begin it in our hearts. With all my heart, Lord, I know that our churches will start fulfilling God’s purposes together. When that happens we’ll see a new reformation in the church and a new spiritual awakening in our country. And God, we need it!

Now you pray. Say, “Dear God, forgive me for the times I felt like I didn’t need other people in my life. I want to be a part of what You’re doing on earth, Your family the church. I want to experience real community. I’m tired of superficial relationships. I want to learn to really love and be loved in a deeper way. I open up my life to You, Jesus Christ. Come into my life. Accept me into Your family. Thank You for this place to belong and grow. I don’t want to be a passive follower any more. Today I commit to getting into a small group so I can learn about community. Please bless our church family as we do 40 Days of Community. In Your name. Amen.”